

THE DIALECTIC OF DISINFORMATION AND THE DEMONISATION OF GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER NIKOS KOTZIAS

Marios Evriviades

Professor of international relations and diplomatic history at Neapolis University Pafos

"[Philip] Agee spent 12 years (1957-69) as a CIA case officer, most of it in Latin America. His first book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, published in 1974 revealed how it was a common Agency tactic to write editorials and phoney news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of the CIA authorship or CIA payment to the particular media. The propaganda value of such a "news" item might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans."

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/46390.htm>

"Where once journalists were active gatherers of news, now they have generally become mere passive processors of unchecked, second-hand material, much of it contrived by PR to serve some political or commercial interest. Not journalists, but churnalists. An industry whose primary task is to filter out falsehood has become so vulnerable to manipulation that it is now involved in the mass production of falsehood, distortion and propaganda".

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/feb/04/comment.pressandpublishing>

I have chosen these two quotes, almost 50 years apart, to start my brief essay in order to illustrate a fundamentally truth about the dialectics of disinformation and propaganda: that as a general rule, the more things change - and by gosh in the intervening years the world witnessed no less an event like the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union- the more they remain the same.

It is my basic thesis that "the mass production of falsehood, distortion and propaganda" has been deliberately and viciously practised against the Foreign Minister of the Hellenic Republic Nikos Kotzias over the past month or so, because he is considered an "obstacle" to the so called "reunification" of Cyprus under the mediation of the "good offices" of the United Nations, as mandated by the Security Council.

This vicious campaign by "churnalists" has had its origins in the Cypriot Presidential office, that is, it was carried out at the behest and with the guidance of the Cypriot President himself. The minions of his Office and his old party, the Dimokratikos Synagermos, led by the lacklaster

politician Averof Neophytou, implemented it with the usual zeal of lapdogs.

But to be fair it must be said that the politically convenient idea of demonising the Greek official did not have its origins with Anastasiades. It came from his "partner-in-reunification" the Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci and Ankara's "ic oylan" (Turkish for the boys that were in the service of Ottoman officials in the hamams and the harems), in Cyprus.

On orders from Ankara, Akinci had asked Anastasiades to "rein in" Kottias. The Turks considered him "responsible" for the "breakdown" of the talks in Peleran Switzerland last January. These talks had been announced with much fanfare by the UN special representative in Cyprus, the Norwegian Espen Barth Eide and they were advertised as the end run of the Cyprus talks leading to the so called and lionised "reunification".

Nikos Kottias was demonised because he refused to budge from his unassailable thesis that for a Cyprus solution to be had, the core issue of the problem -namely the four decades plus military occupation of a large part of Cypriot territory by over 40, 000 Turkish troops- needs to come to an end, together with its enabling system of neo-colonial "guarantees". In other words, the issue of the illegal Turkish occupation and colonisation, which violate all precepts of the UN Charter, UN Resolutions on Cyprus, customary and general international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, must be addressed effectively and permanently for a Cyprus solution to be lasting.

Greece informed all interested parties that she was and remains unwilling to reassume any form of "guarantor role" in Cyprus. And without the consent and participation of Greece, the guarantor tripod of the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey, imposed on Cyprus in 1960 as a condition for independence cannot stand and therefore no solution can acquire the required "legitimacy" that the Anglo-Americans seek.

Turkey, and the so called international community-INTCOM- consider the re-imposition of this neo-imperialist system as an absolutely vital ingredient for their Cyprus plans. Try as they can, Turkey and its patrons cannot get around this, as Greece will not act as their lackey, again. So they want to get rid of the Greek Foreign Minister who, another rumour has it, does not enjoy the confidence of his Prime Minister. This is what the demonisation campaign against Kottias is all about.

The Anglo-Americans, Turkey's patrons since WWII, and the fawning UN representative Eide, are opposed to the Kottias position with the inane logic that it is unacceptable to Turkey, the party of aggression, which also happens to be their beloved, special and valuable NATO ally. Never mind that since 2003 Turkey, under the salafist leadership of its Buyuk (Great)

Leader Erdogan, has been an enabler, an odious apologist as well as a practitioner- in Syria and elsewhere- of Sunni jihadist terrorism!

Unfortunately Anastasiades has adopted part of this Anglo-American-Eide logic, namely-and as Akinci convinced him- that the Kotzias position makes Turkey "angry" which in turn "reduces" Akinci's flexibility for "concessions" and thus neither he, nor Anastasides can achieve their "dream of reunification". The pathetic Cypriot leader accepted the Akinci argument whole stock and barrel and ordered his yesmen to attack Kotzias blaming him for "disrupting"...his strategy and not, by the way, the strategy of the Turks!

Thus commenced the demonisation of Kotzias, faithfully carried out through the three pro government newspapers, namely Politis, Alithia and the Cyprus Mail. They are the ones that started the demonisation ball rolling. The under the belt attacks against Kotzias were "reproduced" in Europe and the US and, after gaining the "legitimacy" traction that former colonials long for from the West, the anti-Kotzias diatribes returned back to Cyprus to be cited, quoted and reproduced by those who acted as the disinformation vehicles in the first place- Politis, Alithia and the Cyprus Mail, of which more later.

In this manner the dialectic of disinformation and agitprop (agitation and propaganda) completes its cycle. In this business "laundering" the so called "news" so as to provide them with an "aura" of legitimacy, is absolutely essential for any prospects of success.

Here it must be emphasised that the aim of propaganda is not to con your enemies but to con your own people. Which is precisely what Anastasiades and his ilk have been doing and aiming at all along. They constantly engage in this cesspool process in order to draw attention away from their ineffective, or, as the Greeks say in jest under such circumstances, their "arpa-kola" (acting without thinking) strategy in dealing with Ankara. The bottom line of this "arpa-kola" strategy, is that Turkey's so called "strategic needs" in Cyprus must be met and that therefore Turkish troops and Turkish guarantees "must" be accepted so that the goal of "reunification" can be achieved. Nikos Kotzias says that Greece wants no part in this mockery and that Athens will not play the role of a political sucker in such international machinations. It is this position that has turned him into a target.

For the rest of this essay I shall attempt to deconstruct this cycle of disinformation, namely the demonisation of Nikos Kotzias, by concentrating on three foreign journalists-Sara Stefanini, Leonid Davidovich Bershidsky and Andrew Higgins-and how they, "prompted" by the Cypriot "stories", carried the art of disinformation to Cold War heights and standards. And I shall do so by analysing their "stories" using two

research tools, one well known and tested and the other not so well known but extremely effective in cases like the present.

My reference here is to the established tool of "content analysis". The not so well known tool is actually a practical and effective advice from one of my American-Jewish professors who constantly advised us, in his characteristic German accent, that in every research effort we must first "read the author, not the text". A researcher, in other words, must know "who" the author of a story is or, as it is commonly said in this part of the world "what brand of cigarettes he smokes". Once his motivations and ideologies are established, the researcher can proceed with his analysis on solid ground.

During the last phase of the Peleran Geneva talks, Stephanini published three articles in European Politico that is published in Brussels since 2005. European Politico belongs to the American version of Politico, founded in 2007 in Arlington Virginia. The city, for those in the know, is the "bedroom" of the CIA. Politico publishes about 40, 000 copies most of which are given away free, a significant fact that speaks for itself. It is perhaps more significant that its editor-in-chief is a Polish Russophobe, Matthew Kaminski, who immigrated to the US in 1980.

On 12/1/17 the afore mentioned lady published "Cyprus fears Russia could wreck conference", on 13/1/17 "Cyprus talks stumble over questions of security", and on the 16/1/17 "Greek minister blamed for derailing Cyprus talks". On the same day and almost in cue, a certain Leonid Bershidsky published an opinion piece in Forbes Magazine, on the other side of the Atlantic entitled, "Why Putin would want the Cyprus talk to fail." Sara Srephanini tweeted the Bershidsky opinion immediately, proudly revealing, in a sense, her professional relationship with him.

Then on 5/2/17 came the "heavy gun" Andrew Higgins of The New York Times with "Cyprus fears Russian meddling in its settlement talks", rehashing and reserving the same old dish of agitprop.

A rudimentary examination of the bio of these three journalist can provide us with insights into their "work" and especially their ideological and agendas.

Sara Stephanini informs us in her bio that she was born in the US from an Italian father and an Australian mother and that she proudly carries three passports. We also learn that her professional interests were as a "climate and energy reporter based in Brussels". Now how out of the blue and all of a sudden this "climate and energy" reporter was "transformed" into an expert on the Cyprus issue and its intricacies -and commenced to peddle the Western-Turkish propaganda line- is an interesting question.

A likely explanation for her Turkish enthusiasm is that she travels often to Turkey for business but also for vacation and relaxation. She likes the aristocratic art of horseback riding, we read, and in Asia Minor she can surely find plenty of pure blood asian horses for her to practice her skills.

Leonid Davidovich Bershidsky has a more complex and interesting bio. He is basically a person that cannot hold a steady job, so to speak, which in and of itself raises interesting questions on how he makes ends meet. When a person cannot hold a steady professional job and he is found "here and there" establishing journalistic ventures only to close them down, it means that in order to make ends meet for a certain lifestyle on both parts of the Atlantic, he is obliged by circumstances to make compromises that may, or not, necessarily compromise him professionally.

Born in Russia, Leonid Davidovich Bershidsky started his career with the Moscow Times when it was owned by a Dutch media conglomerate with the controversial business oligarch and another wannabe ruler of Russia -Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Leonid left Russia for Kiev after the Ukraine crisis of 2014, disagreeing apparently over the Crimean issue. There he established and shut down a number of journalistic "ventures" which he proudly cites in his bio as representative of his achievements. That they may speak to his incompetence, as well, apparently escapes him.

Beyond the diatric effusions in his opinion piece on Cyprus, he has hardly any "sources" besides those of Stephanini. The latter who may also have as her "source" one of the 28 EU Commissions in Brussels, cites the Cyprus Mail, a paper established by the British Colonial Government in Cyprus in the 1950s in order to oppose the Greek struggle for independence and self-determination. After independence the paper ended with the Iacovides family. The paper regularly carries vicious anti-Russian articles that compete with the psychological aberrant McCarthyism of the 1950s in the US. At times it has even surpassed it.

For example the paper and its "serial gossiper" and editor (he runs a column on coffee shop tales) Kyriakos Iacovides is "bothered" because the Russian envoy speaks Greek and has an active presence in the Republic. (The current British envoy does speak Greek as well but he is apparently on the side of the angels).

Iacovides apparently believes this to be a Russian conspiracy, nay a Purin one, for sabotaging the Cyprus talks and even taking over Cyprus. According to this convoluted logic the Russians do not want a settlement but the British, who have been implementing their divide and impera policies on Cyprus for far too long, do. In fact the British are opposed to any solution and are in favour of the existing status quo through which

they secure their military presence on Cyprus which is unprecedented in the annals of decolonisation and neo-imperialism.

The other side of this British position- the dark side of the moon- is that the Cyprus Mail does not want a solution either. But it pretends otherwise and so far it gets away with it. In fact the paper is a prime supporter of the existing status quo, namely the continuation of the Turkish military occupation together with its "enabling" guarantor system, which is the system that Nikos Kotzias is currently fighting against and for which he is demonised.

Just like the British, the Cyprus Mail has its own interests to defend and this boils down to its very existence. You see its official circulation is about 1500 and it is not known how much of this is given away gratis and what subsidies it may receive, if any, from the British Council, for example. But what is not well known, is that a good part of its readership are British retired expats who live in the occupied part of Cyprus as usurpers of Greek properties. They have the most to lose from a settlement. So does the Cyprus Mail. Kyriacos Iacovides, its editor and "serial gossiper" carries on a supreme Orwellian con, here. Credit is due to him.

I have left Andrew Higgins to the end because he came into the frame last. I will not write much about him but I invite those interested to look him up through an Internet search machine. They should not be fooled by the fact that he once received the Pulitzer prize. He is just another agitprop journalist, a verified Russophobe, an apologist for jihadist terrorism (cf. **Danish Opponent of Islam Is Attacked, and Muslims Defend His Right to Speak, The New York Times February 27, 2013**), and with a record of controversies on various issues that speak for themselves, as in the case of oil fracking in Romania (cf. "Goodbye journalism: the New York Times gossiping about the antifracking movement in Romania" (frackoffromania.wordpress.com/2014/12/09)).

Sara Stephanini, Leonid Davidovich Bershidsky, Andrew Higgins and the Cyprus Mail are left overs of the 20th century and its bankrupt ideologies. At a time when we are entering a post-Cold War epoch and at the time of President Trump, who questions such sacrosanct Atlantic institutions as NATO-which exists because the US pays 75 percent of its costs- we are told, expected to believe and act on the "thesis" that Putin has the time to conspire with his Ambassador in Cyprus, who speaks Greek, to wreck the so called south eastern wing of NATO! They are telling us, all these paragons of humanitarianism, political virtue, all these democrats and "peace producers", that Cyprus will be "Cubanized", again! And all this in a period when communism is in the dustbin of history, the Soviet Union does not exist, Castro is gone and Cuba is fast entertaining the 21st century. What we have here is a total disconnect from reality. These are the 21st century's "crackpot realists".

I end on two final notes. Those interested to educate themselves about how the CIA and its obsequious western intelligence agencies manipulated and played for suckers journalists, authors, artists and intellectuals in the West are advised to read, in addition to the two sources already cited above, the recently published

Finks: *How the C.I.A. Tricked the World's Best Writers*, by Joel Whitney (2017). And the now classic study by Francis Stoner Saunders, **Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War** (1999).

The second note is about President Trump and Nikos Kotzias. The two, while neons apart ideologically, do share the view of the need to end conflicts and produce global and regional conditions for peace. If Hillary Clinton were elected President, promiscuous interventionism in the Middle East and elsewhere would have continued unchecked and and even run amok, given the Democrats and Hillary's bloody record in Libya and Syria and their proclivity for war.

If President Trump manages to establish détente with Russia- to make a "deal" as he loves to say- and thus reduce global bloodshed, he would truly be worthy of the ill received Nobel for peace that Obama was given gratuitously in 2009. And if Kotzias can manage to bring an end to Turkish neo-imperialism and war mongering in Cyprus by ending the colonial system of "guarantees", he would have served the cause of regional peace in the eastern Mediterranean.